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ABSTRACT

The dropout problem in the nation, in the Council of the Great City Schools (GCS) school districts, and in the central cities is reviewed. Annual, single-year, four-year, and status dropout rates are examined. During the decade from 1982 to 1992, the gap in dropout rate between Whites and other ethnic groups has narrowed. The majority of the GCS districts experienced a decline in their annual dropout rates between 1988-89 and 1990-91, and central city youth have actually made gains in high school graduation rates. In 1992, 66.5 percent of central city youth were high school graduates compared to 62.5 percent in 1990. In 1990-91, 36.9 percent of GCS graduates were African American compared to 42.1 percent of the total elementary and secondary enrollment. White students were 28.7 percent of graduates and 25.0 percent of total students; Hispanic Americans made up 22.6 percent of graduates and 26.5 percent of enrollment. In contrast, Asian Americans made up only 5.9 percent of the K through 12 enrollment, yet represented 10.8 percent of graduates. Urban school districts have made some progress in addressing the dropout problem, although far too many students still dropout. Ten graphs present dropout statistics. (Contains 10 references.) (SLD)

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Dropouts in Great City Schools

Vol.2, No.2

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Council of the Great City Schools

urban Indicator

A Research Publication

Vol. 2, No. 2 June 1994

Dropouts in Great City Schools

Introduction

Over the last several years there has been some progress in the urban school dropout problem. The proportion of adults with a high school diploma has increased particularly among racial/ethnic minorities, who historically have been most prone to dropping out of the educational pipeline. Today more of the young adult population has completed high school than a decade ago. For exampie, between 1982 and 1992, the high school completion rates for African American youth (i.e., 18- to 24-year olds) increased from 70.9 percent to 74.6 percent (Carter and Wilson, 1994). Most of this gain was among African American males who increased their high school completion rates from 65.6 percent in 1982 to 72.3 percent in 1992.

Progress has been particularly strong in our large urban school systems in lowering dropout rates and increasing school retention and high school completion rates. During the last two years the annual dropout rate in the central cities decreased while the rates increased slightly in the suburbs. Yet, there are still those students who find it difficult to make their way through the system, especially students of color, those from immigrant or low income families, and those who have limited-English proficiency.

Given that people of color will comprise more than a third of the total national population by 2020, it is necessary that we review the dropout problem in our urban schools where the problem remains acute. While the problem is not just an urban one, it has broader societal implications. In 1991, 24.2 percent of the heads of households living in poverty did not have a high school diploma, compared to 10.5 percent of those with a high school diploma and 6.5 percent of those with some postsecondary education. Education is the key to remaining out of poverty and to the jobs of the future.

In addition, the workforce is changing rapidly, with high growth jobs projected to demand more skills by the year 2000 than those now. More than half of the occupations that will be in most demand in the future will require at least some postsecondary education. A high school diploma or equivalent is key to gaining access to further education. Further, between now and 2000, people of color will double their share of the labor force and comprise 29 percent of the new entrants into the labor market (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1988). By contrast, white males will comprise 15 percent of the new entrants into the labor force.

Due to the changing demographics and the structure of the labor force, it is crucial that efforts be made to educate all of our nation's students if America is to compete in the global economy of the 21st century.

The purpose of this report is to review the dropout problem in the nation and in the Council of the Great City School districts (GCS) and the central cities. This report will address who the dropouts are; what the dropout rate is in the GCS and the central cities; the progress made in addressing the issue; and the groups most prone to drop out. In order to address these issues, this report will look at the annual, single year, and status dropout rates, and their consistency. Further, we will look at implications for society and Great City School districts.

Highlights

- During the decade 1982 to 1992, the gap in dropout rates between Whites and other ethnic groups has narrowed.
- The majority of GCS districts (77.8 percent) experienced a decline in their annual dropout rates between 1988-89 and 1990-91.
- Currently Hispanics have the highest dropout rate of all racial/ethnic groups.

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- The dropout rates in the central cities declined during the eighties and the gap between them and the suburbs has narrowed.
- During the period 1982 to 1992, African American males made more gains in lowering their annual dropout rate than any other racial/ethnic group.

Annual Dropout Rates

National

- During the decade 1982 to 1992, the annual dropout[1] rate for grades 10-12 declined from 5.4 percent to 4.3 percent (Census, 1993).
- Between 1982 and 1992, the annual dropout rate for males declined from 5.7 percent to 3.8 percent.
- In 1992, male 10th-12th grade students were less likely to drop out than their female counterparts (3.8 percent vs. 4.8 percent).
- From 1982 to 1992, the dropout rates for females in grades 10-12 declined from 5.1 percent to 4.8 percent.

  —However, in 1988, the dropout rate for females was slightly lower than their current rate (4.5 percent).
- In 1992, the annual dropout rate varied by race/ethnicity: the dropout rate for White 10th-12th graders was 4.1 percent; African American, 4.9 percent; and Hispanics 7.9 percent (chart 1).

Chart 1

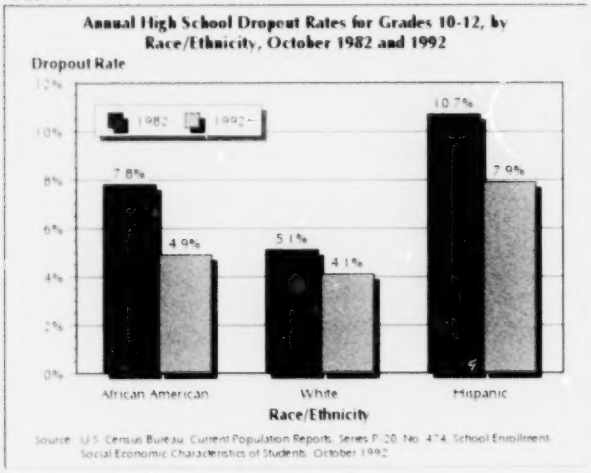
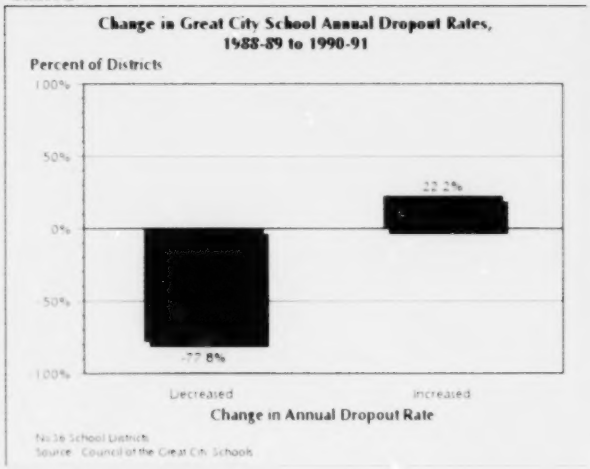


Chart 2



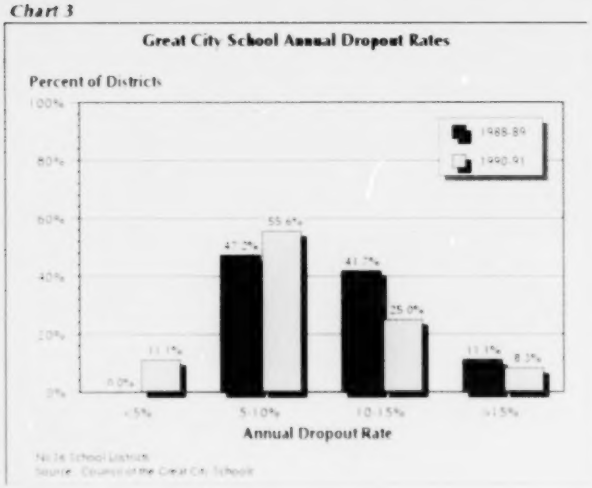
- During the decade 1982 to 1992, the gap in annual dropout rates between Whites and other racial/ethnic groups narrowed.

  —For example, in 1982, African Americans had a dropout rate that was 2.7 percentage points greater than their White counterparts; by 1992, the gap narrowed to only 0.8 percentage points.
- In 1992, students from low income families had an annual dropout rate of 10.9 percent; this is in comparison to an annual dropout rate of 4.4 percent for those from middle income families and 1.3 percent for their higher income counterparts.

Great City Schools

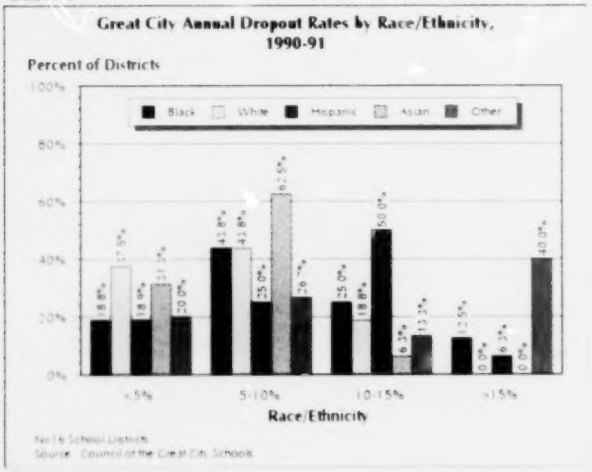
- During the period 1988-89 and 1990-91, more than three-quarters (77.8 percent) of the Great City Schools (GCS) reported a decrease in their annual dropout[2] rates; another 22.2 percent indicated that the annual dropout rates had increased (chart 2).
- In 1990-91, more than one of ten (11.1 percent) GCS districts reported an annual dropout rate of less than 5 percent, in comparison to 1988-89 in which none of the GCS indicated an annual dropout rate in this range (chart 3).
- More than half (55.6 percent) of the GCS districts reported an annual dropout rate between 5 and 10 percent in 1990-91, while 47.2 percent reported annual dropout rates in this range in 1988-89.

Chart 3



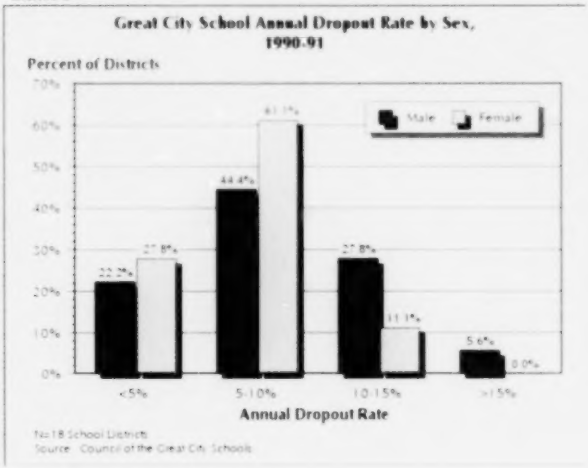
- In 1990-91, less than 9 percent (8.3 percent) of GCS districts reported a dropout rate of greater than 15 percent; this is down from 1988-89, when 11.1 percent of GCS districts had annual dropout rates in this range.
- The annual dropout rates in the GCS varied by race/ethnicity. For example, in 1990-91, 62.5 percent of GCS districts had annual dropout rates between 5 and 10 percent among Asian Americans. In comparison, 43.8 percent of GCS districts had annual dropout rates in this range among African Americans and Whites and 25.0 percent of GCS districts had these rates among Hispanics (chart 4).

Chart 4



- In 1990-91, half (50.0 percent) of GCS districts had annual dropout rates between 10 and 15 percent among Hispanics; one quarter (25.0 percent) of GCS districts had this rate among African Americans.
- More than 6 of 10 (61.1 percent) GCS school districts reported annual dropout rates between 5 and 10 percent among young women in 1990-91; in comparison, 44.4 percent of GCS districts reported this range among young men (chart 5).

Chart 5



- In 1990-91, 5.6 percent of GCS districts had annual dropout rates of 15 percent or more among males, while none of the districts reported dropout rates in this range among young women.

Central Cities and Other Areas

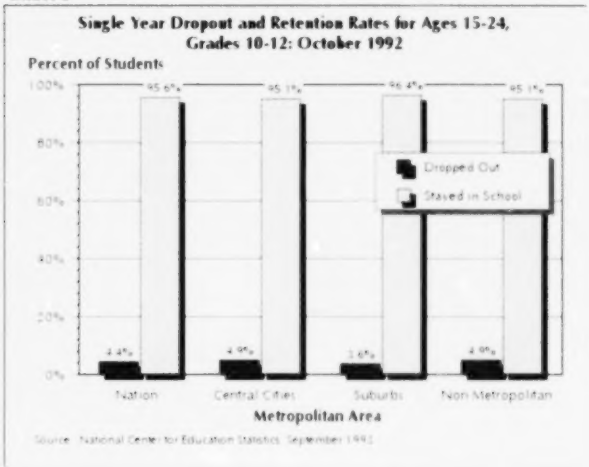
- The annual dropout rate is down in central cities while the rates have increased for other areas. Between 1990 and 1992, the annual dropout rate in central cities declined from 5.7 percent to 4.9 percent. This compared to a national rate of 4.1 percent in 1990 and 4.4 percent in 1992 (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993).
- In 1990 the annual dropout rate stood at 3.2 percent in suburban areas and increased slightly in 1992 to 3.6 percent.
- In 1992 the annual dropout rate in non-metropolitan areas was 4.9 percent; this is an increase compared to 1990 when the dropout rate was 3.5 percent.

Single Year Dropout Rate

Nation

- In 1992, the single year[1] dropout rate in the nation was 4.4 percent; this is down from 5.5 percent in 1982 (chart 6).

Chart 6



- Between 1982 and 1992, the national school retention rate increased from 94.5 percent to 95.6 percent.

- In 1992, females had a higher single year dropout rate than their male counterparts (4.9 percent vs. 3.9 percent).

- In 1992, the single year dropout rate varied by race/ethnicity: for Whites the rate was 3.7 percent, while for African Americans it was 5.0 percent and 8.2 percent for Hispanics.

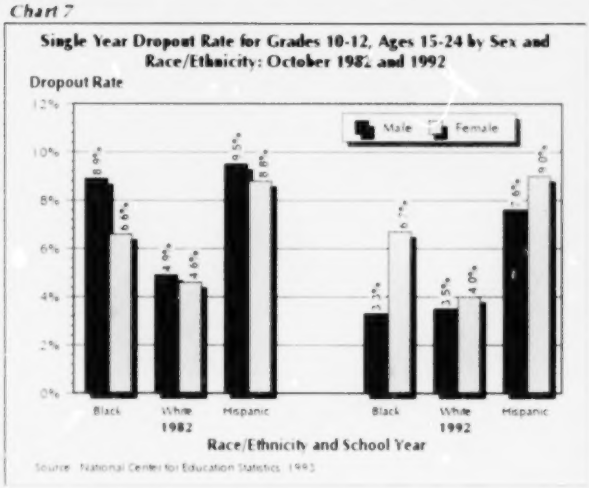
- During the ten-year period 1982 to 1992, African American males made progress in their single year dropout rate, which declined by 5.6 percentage points (chart 7).

  —This is a larger decline than for any of their male counterparts. For example, the single year dropout rate for Hispanic males declined by 1.9 percentage points (from 9.5 percent to 7.6 percent).

Central City

- In 1992, the single year dropout rate in the central cities was 4.9 percent, slightly higher than the rate in the suburbs, which was 3.6 percent.

Chart 7



Four-Year Dropout Rates

Great City Schools

- Between 1988-89 and 1990-91, half of the GCS districts had a decrease in their four-year dropout[3] rate and half experienced an increase in this rate (Great City Schools, 1993).

- During the period 1988-89 and 1990-91, the percent of GCS districts whose four-year dropout rates were between 25-35 percent declined from 43.8 percent of the districts to 37.5 percent of the districts.

- The percent of GCS districts with four-year dropout rates between 15-25 percent rose from 18.8 percent in 1988-89 to 25.0 percent in 1990-91.

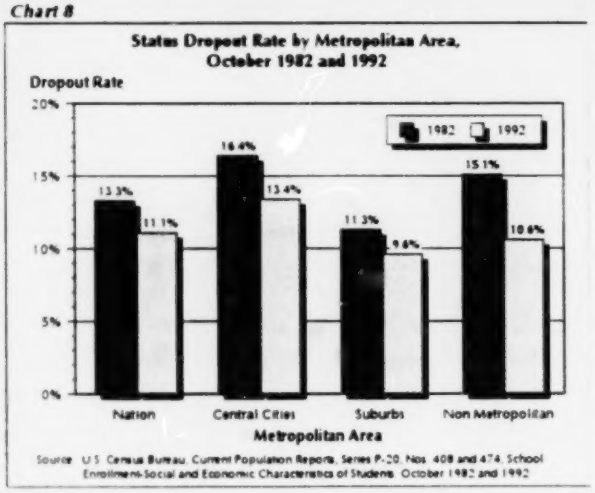
Status Dropout Rates

In this section we review dropout trends among the 16- to 24 -year-old population (i.e. those who are not high school graduates and not enrolled in school). This will allow us to determine the extent of the dropout problem among the youth population and to delineate educational and training needs.

Nation

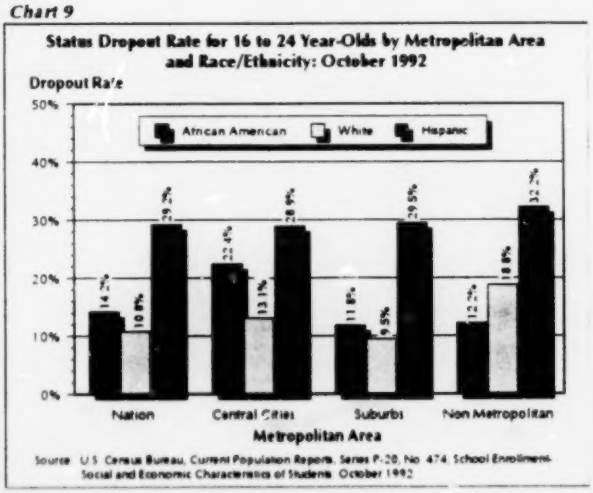
- In 1992, 11.1 percent of the 16- to 24-year-old population were high school dropouts; this is down slightly from 1982 when 13.3 percent of this population were status dropouts[5] (chart 8).

Chart 8



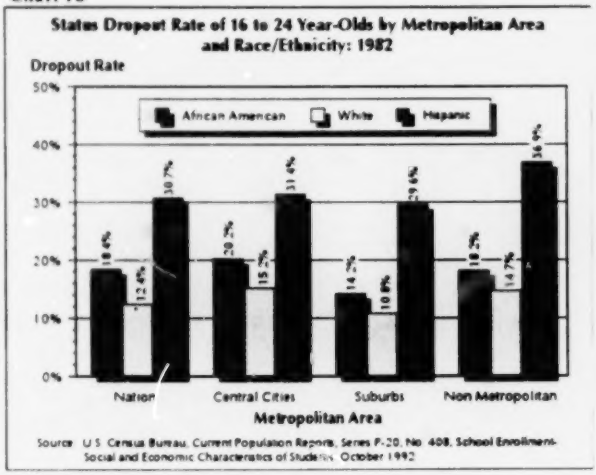
- In 1992, male 16- to 24-year-olds had a slightly higher status dropout rate than their female counterparts (11.3 percent vs. 10.7 percent).
- The status dropout rate varied by race/ethnicity in 1992: 10.8 percent of Whites, 14.2 percent of African Americans and 29.2 percent of Hispanics (chart 9).
- During the 1982 to 1992 period, the status dropout rate declined for all racial/ethnic groups; however, Hispanics experienced the least decline in their status dropout rate (1.5 percentage points) (chart 10).
- The status dropout rate was highest among the low-income group in 1992 (24.6 percent), followed by the middle income group (10.1 percent), and lowest among the high income group (2.3 percent).

Chart 9



- This relationship held among all racial ethnic groups in 1992; however, the status dropout rate among low income Hispanics was the highest (44.7 percent). This was about 2 times the rate among low-income African Americans and almost 2.5 times greater than their White counterparts.
- In 1992, 24.4 percent of status dropouts had completed 10th grade and another 27.1 percent had completed 11th grade; 9.3 percent had entered 12th grade but failed to receive their high school diploma.
- The level of education attained by status dropouts varied by race/ethnicity. For example, in 1992, 34.7 percent of African Americans had completed 11th grade as did 29.6 percent of Whites and 18.5 percent of Hispanics.

Chart 10



Central City

- In 1992, 13.4 percent of the 16- to 24-year-old population in central cities were status dropouts.

  —This is higher than the status dropout rate for the nation (11.1 percent).

- However, the gap in status dropout rates between the central cities and the nation narrowed somewhat during the 1982 to 1992 decade. In 1982, the status dropout rate in central cities was 3.1 percentage points higher than in the nation (16.4 percent vs. 13.3 percent), compared to 1992 when the central cities status dropout rate was 2.2 percentage points higher than the nation (13.4 percent vs. 11.1 percent).

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Immigrants and Language

- In 1989, the status dropout rate for students born outside of the U.S. (i.e., 50 states and D.C.) was 28.9 percent.
- In comparison, among Hispanics born outside the U.S. the status dropout rate was 43.0 percent in 1989 versus 7.9 percent for non-Hispanic immigrants.
- Overall, the dropout rate for Hispanics varied by ethnic group: the dropout rate for Mexican Americans was 35.8 percent; Puerto Ricans 32.1 percent ; Cubans 9.2 percent and other Hispanics was 19.0 percent (NCES, 1992).
- In 1989, nearly half (45.0 percent) of all Hispanics in the 16- to 24-year-old age group were born outside the U.S.
- In 1992, Hispanics who spoke Spanish at home had a status dropout rate twice that of those who spoke English at home (32.1 percent vs. 14.1 percent).

Implications

Urban school districts have made some progress in addressing the dropout problem. The dropout rates in the GCS districts and the central cities have declined considerably, while school retention rates have increased. Further, the gap between the central cities and the suburbs has narrowed somewhat. However, despite the gains made, our society can ill afford to allow significant numbers of low-income, immigrant youth and youth of color to lead adult lives in which they are estranged from a productive life due to lack of education.

Several issues become quite clear as a result of reviewing the various dropout rates. Why are so many Hispanic youth dropping out of high school? How can our school systems meet the needs of immigrant and Limited English Proficient (LEP) youth? Is there any relationship between the high Hispanic dropout rate and the low numbers of Hispanic teachers in urban schools? Currently, 30.7 percent of the students attending GCS are Hispanic but only 8.8 percent of the teachers are (Great City Schools, October 1993). What types of programs or strategies would best reach these populations? How can urban school districts further meet the needs of the dropout population? Will the dropout problem increase in our urban school systems with increased standards? If so, what impact will opportunity-to-learn standards have on populations who are at-risk of dropping out? What is the relationship between declining resources in urban school districts and the ability to address the needs of dropouts? How can urban communities meet the needs of those dropouts who are not connected to the school system (i.e., status dropouts)? In a recent poll conducted of the GCS' leadership, almost two-thirds (64.4 percent) of GCS leaders identified bilingual education and non-English speaking students as one of the top ten issues of concern (Ottinger and Root, 1994). Today there are more than 165 languages spoken by GCS students.

The data on dropouts also illustrates the need to have disaggregated data particularly for recent immigrant groups. This would allow policymakers, educators and others to identify the subgroups who are most prone to dropping out in addition to adequately monitoring the problem. Further there is a need for uniform definitions of dropouts across school districts so that we can have meaningful measures that allow us to monitor this problem nationally.

Notes

[1]The annual high school dropout rate is an estimate of the proportion of students who dropout of school in a single year. This estimate is calculated as the ratio of the number of persons who were enrolled in a grade in the preceding year survey, did not complete the grade and are not currently enrolled.

[2]Great City School Annual Dropout Rates. The percents for the years 1988-89 and 1990-91 were calculated by dividing the total number of districts responding with three years' worth of annual dropout data and whose self-reported rates were within specified intervals by the total number of districts responding. Intervals were established to mute the inconsistencies of dropout definitions and rates from one city to another.

[3]The single year dropout rate (i.e., event rate) measures the proportion of individuals who have dropped out of school over a specified time interval, in this case, one year. The data included in this section of the report is for ages 15 to 24 years old and for grades 10 -12.

urban Indicator

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Newsletter Staff:

Michael Casserly
Executive Director

Cecilia A. Ottinger
Director of Research

Mark A. Root
Research and Systems Specialist

Urban Indicator
Council of the Great City Schools
1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Suite 702
Washington, D.C. 20004

(202) 393-2427
(202) 393-2400 (fax)

[4]Great City School Four Year Dropout Rates. Percents were calculated by dividing the total number of districts responding with three year's worth of four year dropout rates by the total number of districts responding to the question.

[5]The status dropout rate measures the proportion of a population who have not completed high school and are not enrolled at one point of time, regardless of when they dropped out.

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Key Facts

- ✓ In 1992, 90.3 percent of the 18 and 19 year old population in the nation were high school graduates.
- ✓ In 1990, 88.6 percent of this population were high school graduates.
- ✓ Central city youth (18 and 19 year olds) have made gains in their high school graduation rates.

  In 1992, 66.5 percent of central city youth were high school graduates compared to 62.5 percent in 1990.
- ✓ In 1992, 72.9 percent of suburban youth were high school graduates , as were 77.3 percent in 1990.
- ✓ About 73 percent (72.8 percent) of youth in nonmetropolitan areas were high school graduates in 1992 and 71.0 percent of these youth were high school graduates in 1990.
- ✓ In 1990-91, the graduates of the Great City Schools (GCS) comprised 4.0 percent of total K-12 enrollment compared to a national average of 5.5 percent.
- ✓ In 1990-91, 36.9 percent of GCS graduates were African American compared to 42.1 percent of the K-12 enrollment; 28.7 percent were White compared to 25.0 percent; 22.6 percent were Hispanic compared to 26.5 percent; and 10.8 percent of graduates were Asian American compared to 5.9 percent of the K-12 enrollment.

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